

El Alisal - The Lummis Home  
200 East Avenue 43  
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County  
California

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction  
1000 Geary Street  
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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EL ALISAL - THE LUMMIS HOME

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California

ADDRESS: 200 East Avenue 43, (Pasadena Freeway exit Ave. 43)  
OWNER: State of California  
OCCUPANT: California Historical Society, Los Angeles Office  
Lummis Memorial Association  
USE: Historical Monument Museum and Office

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

El Alisal (Spanish for "The Sycamore") is a large stone house of studied primitive decor, owner built by Charles F. (Don Carlos) Lummis, (1859-1928) and heterogeneous in composition, largely of field stone, hand hewn timbers and used log telephone poles. The home became the nucleus of a cultural colony, and here for more than 25 years Mr. Lummis entertained many men and women of high intellectual achievement and renown.

This house has been considered of historical value as "Other Structures Considered" under Theme XX - "The Arts and Sciences, sub-theme C - "Literature, Drama and Music", by the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings conducted by the United States Department of Interior, National Park Service; and is California Registered Historical Landmark #531.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

El Alisal, the two-story "castle" home of Charles F. (Don Carlos) Lummis, Southwestern author, editor, librarian, historian and archeologist, was built of granite boulders and concrete between 1896 and 1910. Lummis built it with his own hands. It occupies

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a 2½ acre site on the west bank of the Arroyo Seco in the shadow of Mt. Washington in Highland Park within view of the Los Angeles City Hall tower. Lummis constructed it of water-worn rock from the site and from the bordering stream bed of the arroyo, and timber telephone poles wangled from the Santa Fe Railroad. It was to be home-office-museum and to "last for a thousand years".

Attracted by the fame and outgoing personality of Lummis, who was then the foremost man of letters in the Southland, people of talent - poets, painters, sculptors, musicians and business and professional personages who were alert to the non-material values of life - took up residence near El Alisal. Here they often joined with Lummis for concerts, lectures, convivial dinner parties, annual banquets for the "March Hares", and for contests in wit and wisdom. Here were brought most of the American and foreign celebrities who visited Los Angeles, including scientists, college presidents, authors, painters, singers, musicians, as well as cowboys and Indians.

For a dozen years Lummis edited the spirited magazine, "Land of Sunshine" (later "Out West"), whose files are a gold mine of Southwestern history (he had already written ten books on the Southwest and surveys of California for the encyclopedias Britannica and Americana and created the slogan "See America First"). As a dynamic editor, he sought out people of promise whose writings reflected the Western scene and gave them a showcase in which to display their wares. Among those young people who took up residence in El Alisal or moved to nearby houses and profited from Lummis' advice and encouragement were writer-poets Mary Austin, Ida Meacham Strobbridge, Sharlott Hall, Eugene Manlove Rhodes and painters Maynard Dixon and Ed. Borein. Others who benefited from their association with Lummis were painter-sculptor Gutzon Borglum, painter Ferdinand Lundberg, David P. Barrows (later President of the University of California), and Frank Gibson (later U. S. Ambassador to Belgium).

Mr. Lummis was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, on March 1, 1859. His early education was provided by his father, Henry Lummis, noted Methodist minister and later college professor, who started his son on Latin at age of 7, Greek at 8, and Hebrew at 9. Later Lummis attended Harvard, class of '81, where he published his first book "Birch Bark Poems". He wrote the poems, set them in type, printed them on birch bark, which he gathered in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and sold over 12,000 copies. After leaving college he became editor of the Scioto Gazette at Chillicothe, Ohio. In

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1884, having arranged to write a series of weekly letters recounting his experiences for the Los Angeles Times, he set out on foot from Cincinnati and walked more than 3000 miles to Los Angeles. General Harrison Gray Otis, publisher of the Times, met him at San Gabriel Mission and together they walked the last 9 miles to the City of the Angels. The next morning, February, 1885, Lummis became the first City Editor of the Los Angeles Times (thus increasing the staff by 100 per cent). The population numbered 12,000 and the Times' circulation was 3700. The following year Lummis served the Times as war correspondent in the Army's pursuit of Geronimo. In 1887, due to exhaustion from working 18-20 hours a day, Lummis suffered a paralysis (at the age of 28) which made his left side useless. The story of his subsequent recovery through the exertion of his considerable will power may be found in his autobiographical booklet "My Friend Will".

Characteristically, Lummis refused to spend his convalescence in a wheel chair. Instead, he went to live among Indian friends in the Pueblo of Isleta in New Mexico. Here he broke wild horses and kept the men in a sheep camp supplied with meat as a one-armed hunter. Here, too, was he most prolific in the production of books which brought him fame and introduced the Southwest to thousands of readers: A New Mexico David, The Land of Poco Tiempo, The King of The Broncos and Pueblo Indian Folk-Stories.

Late in 1894 Lummis took over the editorship of the "Land of Sunshine" and converted it from a booster publication to a literary magazine of high quality which for a dozen years provided him with a podium from which he advocated support for his numerous crusades: preservation of the missions, decent treatment for the Indians, conservation of the Redwoods and recording Indian and old California folksongs. In his monthly column, The Lion's Den, he expressed in forthright editorials his sometimes unpopular opinions opposing Imperialism in Cuba, Panama and the Philippines, stupidity in the Indian and other Governmental departments, and against injustices anywhere. Most subscribers habitually turned first to see who was the object of the Lion's roars.

Upon his elevation to the Presidency, after the death of McKinley in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt, in the preparation of his first address to Congress, telegraphed for Lummis to come to Washington to advise him about Indians (among whom Lummis had lived and was an authority) and Western matters in general.

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From 1905 to 1910 Lummis held the post of Librarian for the City of Los Angeles. Here he introduced many practical procedures which improved the efficiency of the system and made it one of the finest in the country. To this day librarians hold Lummis in high esteem for his colorful, unconventional personality and for his slashing of the red tape in library administration.

Following his term as City Librarian, Lummis devoted his energies to his writing and the development of the Southwest Museum which he had founded in 1907. In a few years he had secured funds to acquire a 20 acre site on an acropolis overlooking Sycamore Grove and the Arroyo Seco, had received a bequest of \$50,000 for the first building, and was busy devising and supervising the architecture of the Spanish convent-like building above Museum Drive and Marmion Avenue. He also personally superintended the construction and installation. The tower which dominates the structure contains a helix or caracole with a central shaft for the stair, with forty foot square rooms around its nine-foot well.

For more than fifty years the Southwest Museum has been regarded as a scientific institution of high repute and as one of Los Angeles' foremost cultural assets. Among its many treasures are letters and memorabilia of General John C. Fremont and his immortal wife, Jesse; Lummis' archeological collections; and his fine library of South-western books.

El Alisal was never completed - it was never intended to be, since Lummis considered it to be a kind of gymnasium which provided the physical activity he required to counterbalance his extensive mental pursuits. His plans included a portales porch of Roman arches, to enclose the patio with additional rooms, to fabricate iron grillwork for the windows, and to roof the building with tiles of his own making.

For his work on the Southwest Museum and on El Alisal the Los Angeles chapter of AIA made Lummis an Honorary Member.

In keeping with the terms in Lummis' will the Southwest Museum acquired El Alisal in 1928, together with his rich archeological collections from North, Central and South America and his extensive library of Mexican and Western Americana.

By 1939 the burden of maintaining the property became onerous and the Museum announced that it would release it for \$6,000. When word

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circulated that a prospective buyer intended to use El Alisal as the nucleus for a bungalow court, admirers of Lummis bestirred themselves. The League of Women Voters, led by Mrs. J. L. Criswell, called a meeting to explore the possibilities of a rescue. The Women's Auxiliary of the Chamber of Commerce, under Miss Grace Stoermer, offered a check for \$100. Miss Ella Watterson, Marion Parks Partridge and Mrs. Beatrice Lummis Simmons, who was a noted cook, provided dinners for service and other clubs and raised the rescue fund to \$1,000.

The next year Marion Parks Partridge, assisted by Mary Workman, Mrs. Frances Noel, Mrs. Clarence J. Shults, Mrs. Florence Schoneman, actor Hobart Bosworth, Marco Newmark, Councilman Briggs, L. E. Behymer and Attorney Joe Scott, formed the C. F. Lummis Memorial Association, whose nominal dues barely kept interest in Lummis alive.

Transfer of the property to the State was effected after Senate Bill #158, January 13, 1941, introduced by Senators Robert Kenney and John Phillips, was passed, providing \$5,000 to the Museum. In time the City Recreation and Parks Department (whose director, George Hjelte, was sympathetic to the idea) arranged to lease it from the State and to maintain it. However, due to shortage of funds, it was not ready for public use until 1954 after a strong campaign led by Althea Warren, then a dedicated President of the Lummis Association, brought desired action in the Park Department. She was aided by Florence Kreider, Councilman Holland, Grace Coffin and the Park Department, and other earlier dependables. Money was provided for the comfort of visitors. In 1958 an appropriation was made for the rehabilitation of El Alisal. (Engineers for the Department insisted that the building be made to conform to the City's building code of today and recommended that a 6" shell of Gunitite plus numerous reinforcing ribs be applied to the inner walls throughout the building. Fortunately Architect-Engineer Burnet Turner, who has had extensive restoration experience, pointed out that the building was State property and thus exempt from the City building code.)

After the death, February 24, 1961, of Mrs. Beatrice Simmons, (daughter-in-law of Lummis, who had been acting as caretaker of El Alisal) the Lummis Association and the Museum invited the Southern California Historical Society, which was then seeking a new home, to set up their headquarters in El Alisal. However, the Society's committee turned down the proposal. Other societies were invited and on March 5, 1961, the California Historical Society opened its

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Los Angeles office in El Alisal. It is manned by a staff consisting of the editor of the Society's Quarterly, Dr. Manuel Servin, and a secretary who make the building available to the public each afternoon except Saturday and Sunday. The Lummis Association, chiefly through dedicated Florence Kreider, acts as host each Sunday afternoon.

The Lummis Association holds several meetings a year for the purpose of informing its members and guests of the achievements of Lummis and of the community's debt to him who was one of the most colorful gems in La Reina's crown, and whose unselfish devotion to the upgrading of California's cultural climate provides an example worthy of imitation.

There are two plaques on the walls of El Alisal which are of interest to people who wish to be informed about Lummis. One plaque, at the entrance to the Museo, reads:

CHARLES F. LUMMIS  
(1859-1928)

Author, Editor, Historian, Poet, Librarian

Erected this building largely with his own hands  
Wrote ten books on our Southwest and California  
Founded the Southwest Museum  
Created the slogan "See America First"  
City Editor, Los Angeles Times (1885-87)  
Directed Los Angeles Public Library (1905-1910)  
Awakened Anglo-Americans to the value of Spanish-American culture  
Awarded knighthood by King of Spain for writing on Spain in America  
Editor, Land of Sunshine and Out West magazine (1894-1910)  
Initiated preservation of California Missions  
Founded Sequoyah League "To make Better Indians by Treating them Better"

The other plaque at the entrance to the dining room from the patio porch seals the crypt which contains Lummis' ashes. It reads:

CHARLES F. LUMMIS  
Mar. 1, 1859 - Nov. 25, 1928

He founded the Southwest Museum  
He built this house

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He saved four Missions  
He studied and recorded Spain in America  
He tried to do his share

#### Historical Events

In a sense, it was an historical event whenever a contributor to American culture was entertained by Lummis in his home. A few of the hundreds who wrote in the Lummis guest book were naturalist-writers John Burrough, John Muir and Ernest Thompson-Seton; painters Frederic Remington, Charlie Russell and William Keith; actress-singers Madame Modjeska, Mary Garden and Madame Schumann-Heink; writers Edwin Markham, William Allen White and Carl Sandburg; college presidents David Starr Jordan and Nicholas Murray Butler; and Frederick W. Hodge of the Smithsonian Institute and later Director of the Southwest Museum.

Other historic events include:

Lummis entertained his college friend ex-President Theodore Roosevelt for dinner. Lummis cooked, and washed the dishes. Teddy wiped.

"Greek George", former camel driver for the U. S. Army Camel Corps, visited Lummis and recalled that years earlier he used to rest his camels under the mannoth sycamore tree around which Lummis built El Alisal.

The Duke of Alba, acting as emissary for the King of Spain, conferred the Order of Isabella la Catolica upon Lummis in recognition for his writings on Spain in America.

Will Rogers joined writers Blasco Ibanez and Eugene Manlove Rhodes and Lummis at El Alisal and later drove them down to Mission San Juan Capistrano to see what Lummis and his Landmarks Club had achieved in the way of restoring the famous mission. Lummis immortalized the occasion by including the four men in his parody poem "The Four Horsemen of the Eucalypts".

Blasco Ibanez witnessed the movie shooting of his best seller "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse". Scenes were shot in El Alisal and the Arroyo Seco.

In a letter to the City of Los Angeles Park Commission, January 11, 1912, Lummis described El Alisal as follows:

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"On parts of lots 12, 13, 14, 15, Block 4 (G. W. Morgan's Sycamore Grove Tract) stands the Lummis Museum; a stone castle of 13 rooms, beside 4 attics, two cellars of concrete, a wooden wing of 4 rooms and cellar; and foundations and outer wall for four more stone rooms. It contains over 2200 tons of masonry, is fire proof (except shingle roof), earthquake proof, and of construction to last a thousand years unimpaired. It is of granite boulders and concrete; practically a monolith. I present blue prints to give some idea of it. Also, a plan of the land. The front is 95 feet; the extreme depth about 100 feet; with an enormous fourfold sycamore in the patio, and others grouped, front and rear. There are in all, 30 sycamores on the property, beside several hundred eucalyptus and fruit trees....There is a 50 foot arbor, and three small gardens of roses, grapes, etc.

"The inside of the museum is in keeping. The woodwork is massive and all by hand---no mill work. The ceiling beams are 10x12 and 8x10, all hewn by me with the broad-ax; except two rooms where they are 12-inch cedar logs burned and rubbed. The ceilings are 5-inch redwood, hewn by me with the adze. The casings are massive; no two doors or windows are alike; all hewn. Front door weighs a ton. Thinnest door three inches thick. Mostly dovetailed. Floor cement, ceilings fireproofed. Choice woods. Many historic timbers and other articles built in.

"I have given over 28 years in my travels in North, South and Central America to the plan and architecture of this house. Over 18 years ago I began its construction; and I spent over 14 years in the actual building with my own hands, with one central purpose in view---to provide an enduring home where my descendants should share with the public the educational exhibits gathered during my life as explorer, archaeologist and historian. Three rooms, respectively 18x18, 27x18 and 23x18, are adapted and now used for exposition purposes; and I plan to build one more 36x16. The bedrooms, kitchen, bath and Den are reserved as Curator's Quarters."

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#### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

El Alisal, the Lummis Home, is an L-shaped castle constructed of granite boulders. Its southern exposure, or front, reveals a two story central portion containing the main entrance. Main entrance doors are a pair of massive 8' high doors ("weight one ton") with intricate iron ornamentation, heavy hinges and oversize lock. Fenestration consists of 8 unconventional wooden windows in wood frames. The hardware was acquired in Mexico and Peru by Lummis. The iron rubric was fabricated by artist Maynard Dixon for Lummis whom he admired. Surmounted by a hip roof, the central portion is flanked by two gabled wings (E-1½ story, W-1-3/4 story). At the southwest corner and attached to the 1-3/4 story portion is a 30' tower (circular). A jog north of the tower reveals a 24' campanile with church bell in place, a 4'-6" x 4' window, a narrow door, and a rock and tile mission type chimney with latticed vent.

#### EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions: Approximately 91' x 60' with 50' x 7' portales or porch on the north side, facing the patio, lily pool and the sycamores for which the home was named.

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Wall Construction: Generally 1' to 2' thick, of rock, concrete and plaster with buttresses up to 5' thick.

Porch: Covered porch extends full width of patio 50' x 7'. Shed roof supported by rock and plaster wall  $1\frac{1}{2}'$  x 1'-7" in height bearing five 8x8 wood posts. Floor is of concrete and at ground level. Access to house is provided by four entrances.

Chimneys: Rock and tile.

Doorways and Doors: Handcrafted of wood of various sizes and designs. Eight exterior doors, mostly below standard height.

Windows: 50 Lummis-made wood sash of various sizes and designs, from 7" to 9' wide.

Roof: Gable, hip and shed roofs covered with shingles. Lummis intended the roof to have handmade tiles.

Roof sections reveal 3" x 6" rafters at 24" o.c. with a 1" x 8" ridge. The ceiling structure consists of solid 5" x 12" planking, several inches of sand and 1" x 12" boards. The planks rest on exposed beams of 8" x 8", 8" x 10" and 8" x 12" with 25" o.c., 29" o.c. and 3'-0" o.c., respectively.

Cornice: Simple barge board and eaves board with extending sheathing boards and rafters.

Miscellaneous: Patio of 50' x 35' was used as living room, dining room and social center almost daily. Shade was provided by a mammoth sycamore which had induced Lummis to buy the property. North of the patio are additional rock buildings. One was built by Lummis' young son for his own. The adjoining structure housed guests. It is now used for storage of gardening tools. A remnant of an unfinished wall at the east end of the patio indicates Lummis' intention of further construction. Recently, plumbers discovered a foundation for a future building heading north from the northwest corner of the kitchen. At first they belittled the job of running a 3/4" pipe through. They regretted it later. Two mural paintings of Aztec and American Indian subjects are found on the walls of the laundry and the patio porch.

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Floor Plan: Ground floor is an L-shaped arrangement of eight rooms with cement floor throughout. The entrance room, or Zaguan, is 16' x 16'. It contains a corner fireplace, enclosed handcrafted cabinet, a 9' exposed beam ceiling of 8 x 10's with 5" x 12" wood planking between beams, and four entrances: the main entrance, the double-hung doors leading to the patio, the entrance to the Museo in the west wall, and opposite it the door to the apartment of the caretaker. There are also three windows and a long shelf suspended from the ceiling which holds examples of fine Indian pottery.

The caretaker's apartment contains two rooms, a kitchen and bath and the stairway to the second floor.. The apartment and upstairs are not open to the public.

The Museo, or Museum, is 25' x 16' with a 13' open beam ceiling with 5" x 12" planking between the beams. The 3' o.c. beams of approximately 12" diameter are telephone poles that have been burned and rubbed to a velvety smoothness. There is an open shelf book case against the east wall. Exhibit cases, containing Lummis' books, memorabilia, arrows and other collections, and examples of literary work achieved by people who were Lummis' proteges, are recessed within the north and south walls. The walls are plaster finished and painted ivory. An ornamental fireplace is in the west wall. In the south wall there is a 9' x 5' window with a border of glass photo plates showing pictures taken by Lummis in North, Central and South America; below it is a 10' built-in storage box and bench. In the southwest corner is a 9' circular ground floor portion of the tower. Its windows are of individual design. One is patterned after a cross section of a barrel cactus and resembles a sunburst. A long shelf suspended from the ceiling near the east wall holds choice Indian pottery. The entrance to the Comedor, or dining room, is cater-corner of the northwest corner of the room.

The Comedor, 22' x 16', plaster finished and painted in ivory has a 9'-2" ceiling with 8 x 8 exposed beams at 28" o.c. with herring bone wood between beams. It has a corner fireplace, seven windows and an unusual alcove in the west wall. The north wall contains an enclosed wood cabinet, the door to the pantry, with a section of redwood burl as a panel, and shelves for dishes. The east wall contains a window and door to the laundry porch,

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an intricately carved cabinet made by Spanish-American craftsmen in New Mexico in 1776 with a window where a mirror might be expected. The window provides a view of the patio portales and two entrances from the patio. Lummis made the base of the cabinet and incorporated this rare 4'-6" x 4'-2" window. The east and south walls have deep 4" x 7" niches for the display of pottery and other treasures as is found in numerous Pueblo Indian houses.

The Cocina, or kitchen, is patterned after one in a mission where Indian cooks cooked over an open fire on the earth floor with the smoke outlet directly overhead. It is 16' x 12' with a plastered wall and ceiling tapering to a vent or chimney. Modern appliances are used today, although Lummis' Spanish cook used a coal stove. Stairs leading to the basement and stairwell are in the east side. There are five windows. One door, north, leads to outdoors; another leads to the laundry porch; another in the south wall leads to the pantry which is three steps lower. There is a food passage-way between the kitchen and the pantry.

The pantry, 6'-6" x 16', has a 9' ceiling with 6x6 exposed beams. It has a 4' square air cooler for food stores on the east end. There is ample shelving, and a ladder to the attic.

The laundry room is equipped with tubs and water supply. It is 16' x 8' with a ceiling 8'-3" with 4x6 exposed beams at 24" o.c. Two doors lead outdoors in the north and south walls. A rest room is located in the southeast corner. The latter is a recent addition for the convenience of visitors.

The basement consists of a food storage room and a wine cellar. The storage room, 15' x 8', has a concrete floor with a drain in the center with shelving about the walls. The wine cellar has an earthen floor and shelving. On the west side is a bricked arch, 24" x 6', leading to a 5' x 5' aircooler. Over both ends of the stairway are arches of 31" x 59" and 2'-6" x 6'.

The rooms on the second floor consist of two bedrooms, an unfinished room, and the upper story of the circular tower. Room #1, reached via stairway in caretaker's apartment, is 12' x 12' with ceiling 10'-6" with exposed 8x8 beams at 25" o.c. In the south wall are two 1'-6" x 4' windows. Between the windows is a 3' x 6' door (to be used after projected completion of portales against exterior south wall).

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The adjoining room 16' x 16' has a corner fireplace, a ceiling of 9'-7" with 8" x 8" exposed beams at 25" o.c. The south wall has a 48" x 3'-6" window and a 3' Dutch type door. The north wall contains a 32" x 6' door flanked by windows 23' x 3'-6" and 16" x 3'-8". A cased opening of 2'-8" x 4'-6" in the west wall leads to the unfinished room and to Lummis' Den in the tower. The tower room is 9' in diameter, its ceiling has 8" x 8" exposed beams and it is floored with 5' x 12" planks.

Flooring: The floors are concrete throughout (except otherwise noted) because the builder, in the interest of simplicity, believed in hoseing out the house occasionally.

Walls: Interior walls are plaster finished.

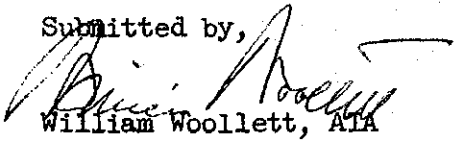
Ceilings: Exposed timbers with wood planking between is typical.

Doorways: Frames and casings were handcrafted by Lummis.

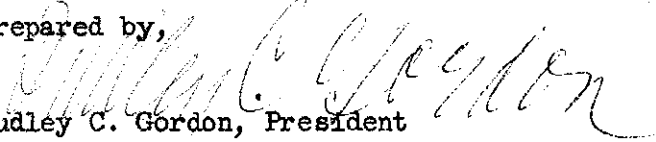
Trim: For doors and the material used for cabinets, benches and heavy doors, etc., redwood, pine, poplar and ash. Some timbers and corbels are from famous buildings in ruin in Latin America.

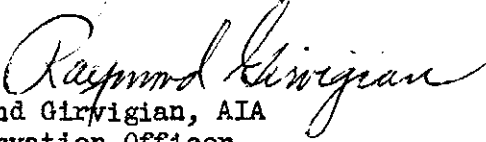
Hardware: Hinges, locks, doorknobs, latches were acquired by Lummis in Mexico, Bolivia, Peru and our own Southwest.

Submitted by,

  
William Woollett, AIA  
AIA Preservation Committee

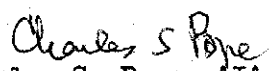
Prepared by,


  
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September 1963

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Western Office, Design and Construction  
National Park Service

DATE:  1964